

Arts in Rural Consultation

Project Evaluation Report



March 2006



Creative Cultures

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**THE ARTS IN RURAL CONSULTATION
PROJECT (ARC)
Community Council of Shropshire**

**EVALUATION REPORT
*'TAKING THE PULSE'***

MARCH 2006

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO REPORT

1 Background to the report

1.1 Introduction

The Community Council of Shropshire (CCS) has supported local rural communities in creating their own Parish Plans. These are defined as 'local community-based plans which are produced by and for the local community at parish, neighbourhood or small town level'. Central to such plans is the need for local consultations to secure the views and opinions of local people on a wide range of issues of local concern.

CCS observed that little use of arts-based consultation has been made across the county in connection with local planning, and consequently developed the Arts in Rural Consultation (ARC) project as a pilot to examine the value of using the arts in this way.

In 2004, CCS secured funding from Arts Council England, West Midlands (ACEWM) to support the project, and in particular to demonstrate the effectiveness of the arts in consulting with the so-called 'hard to reach' sectors of the community. CCS defined these groups as including: 11 – 18 year olds; older people (70+); disabled people; people with caring responsibilities; people living on estates or rurally isolated.

Four parishes were selected, after a competitive application process, and these were paired up with an artist, also recruited through open competition. For comparison purposes, two larger and two smaller parishes were chosen, different levels of funding were made available and the artists selected used key images and texts, but in very different ways.

In addition to boosting the consultation process in the parishes, CCS also hoped that, where appropriate, the final version of the plans might contain works of art in their own right, and was keen to support the creation of artworks as a legacy of the project.

The four projects began in late spring 2005 and are due for completion by spring 2006.

The consultancy, Creative Cultures, was appointed in December 2004 to carry out the external evaluation of ARC.

1.2 Aims of the Report

The agreed main aims of the evaluation of the ARC Project are two-fold:

- to test the basic premise that the arts will actively engage local people in consultation and decision-making, and especially those living in more isolated rural settings
- to track and assess the impacts of such creative activity and process, through to successful completion of the Parish Plans and beyond.

This report will set out details of the process and achievements of the ARC Project and, from an examination of the main findings, we will indicate what we believe to be the main learning outcomes. The report will conclude with key conclusions and a series of recommendations relating to the outcomes and legacy of the whole pilot programme.

1.3 Summary account of the tasks carried out in evaluating the ARC Project

1.3.1 Desk research

We reviewed the following publicly available documentation including:

- Cultural and Arts Strategies for Shropshire County Council
- Community Council for Shropshire website
- Countryside Agency: 'Valuing Villages' teachers' notes for parish plans (with Farming and Countryside Education – FACE); Parish Plan guidance (including 'What Makes a Good Parish Plan?', December 2004)
- Arts Council England: The Arts and Rural England (2005)
- Arts Strategy, Bridgnorth District Council
- Cultural Strategy, South Shropshire District Council
- Arts Strategy, Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council
- Whittington Parish Plan
- Whittington Business questionnaire
- Whittington Household questionnaire

We also reviewed a range of internal documentation including:

- Steering Group Minutes and papers
- ARC Interim Report (July 2005; CCS)
- Four parishes application forms
- Artist selection submissions

1.3.2 Interviews

In the course of the ARC project, we have interviewed the following, including final 'exit' interviews:

- Jonathan Hyams, Community Council for Shropshire
- Dave Reeves, Artist (Bomere Heath)
- Shaun McCarthy, Artist (Rushbury)
- Mark Wood, Artist (St Martins)
- Ian Russell, Artist (Morville)
- Pam Furber, Parish Group (Bomere Heath)
- David Partridge, Parish Group (Rushbury)
- Martin Smith, Parish Group (Rushbury)
- Geraldine Davies (Creator of 2001 photographic archive, Rushbury)
- Alison Baseley, Parish Group (St Martins)
- Caroline Bullock, Parish Group (Morville)
- Sarah Yates, Parish Group (Morville)
- Julie Ruler (Whittington – comparator parish)
- Sue Goodwin, Shropshire County Arts Officer

1.3.3 Attendance at Steering Group meetings

Creative Cultures attended the ARC Steering Group meetings on:

15 November 2004	14 September 2005
23 February 2005	23 January 2006

1.3.4 Observation visits

In order to gain additional insight into how the projects were progressing and examine the interaction between artist and host parish, the evaluators made the following visits:

Bomere Heath, 27 June 2005: to witness work carried out in Bomere Heath Primary and Grafton Primary Schools (observation notes made, Vanessa Bone)

Rushbury, 26 October 2005: meetings with Shaun McCarthy and with David Partridge and Martin Smith. 27 October: geographical tour of parish (notes made, Nicola Gunn)

Morville, 25 October 2005: geographical tour of the parish with Ian Russell, identifying key places and their significance in relation to the project (notes made, Nicola Gunn)

Because of changes in schedules and the consultant's illness, it did not prove possible to visit the projects in **St Martins** parish.

1.3.5 Evaluation documentation received

The evaluators received documentation as follows:

Bomere Heath

Dave Reeves: artist diary 23/02/05 – 02/02/06; CD with images

Pam Furber (for parish group): evaluation questionnaire; completed questionnaires from other parish group members

Rushbury

Shaun McCarthy:

Artist Diary

Village website

David Partridge (for parish group): evaluation questionnaire

Morville

Ian Russell:

Artist Diary 23/2/05-16/01/06

Caroline Bullock (for parish group): evaluation questionnaire

St Martins

Mark Wood: artist diary 23/02/05 – 31/01/06; press cuttings; DVD with Big Event film

Alison Baseley (for parish group): evaluation questionnaire

Community Council for Shropshire

Interim Report to funders, July 2005

1.4 Focus for the report

Following discussions of the structure and format for the Evaluation Report at the Steering Group meeting on 23 January 2006, we will:

- focus on qualitative, rather than quantitative information and analysis
- draw on the qualitative analysis, to produce a clear understanding of the challenges and learning outcomes relating to the overall programme, and their significance for the stakeholders (the Community Council of Shropshire, the Parish Groups and artists, Arts Council of England West Midlands)
- consider the implications of findings for CCS, ACE WM and produce a series of recommendations to help inform the development of future policy and programmes as appropriate.

The whole evaluation report is based on the evidence obtained from the tasks and sources listed above and represents an integral view of the ARC project.

SECTION 2

OVERALL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE ARC PROJECT

2 Overall aims and objectives of the ARC Project

In this section we will set out the **original purpose and intentions** of the ARC Project, together with how it was initiated and managed.

2.1 ARC is a rural arts pilot which set out to:

- develop and promote arts-based mechanisms for engaging the whole community in local planning and consultation
- explore and evaluate the effectiveness of using the arts in this way
- foster a greater appreciation of the value of using the arts as a way to create solutions to local issues
- learn and share skills between professionals working with local rural communities
- spread good practice nationally
- ensure that the final community (parish) plan genuinely reflects the views and needs of everybody who makes up the local community.

These form the outline framework within which the pilot will be evaluated.

2.2 The ARC project was instigated by CCS within the wider context of its support for the Parish Planning process throughout Shropshire. The CCS secured funding from ACE WM for a pilot programme to demonstrate that through using the arts, local community consultation and planning can engage those labelled 'hard to reach', including people living on estates, 11-18 year olds, over 70s, disabled people and those with caring responsibilities. Bridgnorth District Council and Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council also provided funding.

2.3 The Parishes

Four Shropshire parishes were selected (through an open application process) to work with a community artist, as a way of boosting and enriching the local planning process: **Bomere Heath, Morville, Rushbury and St Martins.**

These parishes were chosen to produce a diverse cohort group for the pilot: two large and two smaller settlements; some are targeted for considerable expansion and increases in population; there are distinct differences in geographic location, population density and dispersal, diversity in topography and landscape, including the legacy of agricultural or 'industrial' heritage. Thus the pilot should be able to reflect upon how diversity in the parishes has affected and impacted on the arts practice, project development and the parish planning process.

2.4 Timescale

ARC's original timetable was to begin in late 2004 and be fully completed by the end of 2005. A number of factors have extended the project beyond these dates:

- an unsuccessful first round of artist recruitment
- a slow process of getting projects up and running in the local area: finding the right contacts and community members willing to be actively involved and committed to participation
- a 'natural' break in the summer of 2005.

Overall, the delays have resulted in a mix of benefits and disadvantages, including:

- the longer timescale helped to build up relationships between the artist and the host community
- some loss of momentum has been noted, with the need to revitalise and refresh projects, re-engaging people in the artistic process.


2.5 Management and structure of ARC

A small group (including CCS staff, the Bridgnorth Arts Development Officer as representative of the Shropshire Arts Partnership, and a local community artist) set up the project, recruited the external evaluators and selected the artists. The Steering Group for ARC has met regularly throughout the project's lifetime, to check on progress, report on any issues of concern, and receive updates from the artists and parishes alike. The full Steering Group comprised:

- Community Council of Shropshire staff
- Parish representatives
- Arts Council England West Midlands
- Artists

(with occasional attendance by arts development officers from County and District Councils).

The wider stakeholder group also included the Shropshire Association of Local Councils.



SECTION 3

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION OF THE ARTS PROJECTS

3.1 Introduction

In this section we will set out information on the parishes and artists, as well as what took place in the four parishes, against the background of the original aims and aspirations of both artists and parish groups for their own projects.

3.2 ST MARTINS

The Parish

Location	Oswestry
Population size	3,500 for parish; 3,000 for village of St Martins
Area covered	6 km ²
Main characteristics of parish area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A former coal mining area, with cessation of mining in 1960s • Developed into a dormitory community, with increase in residents seeking employment outside the area • Active groups within the Parish have secured a new village centre building and a skateboard track
Specific interest and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to pay more attention to activities for 10-16 age group and provide better quality green space for all age groups • Want to bolster community spirit and help to overcome apathy in some sectors of the parish • Anti-social behaviour (including vandalism, under-age drinking), traffic levels, poor quality of new housing design are particular concerns • Want to raise quality of life overall for all age groups
Experience of community arts work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One previous unsuccessful project with a Community Photographer (lacked overall proper direction) • Active Parish Handicrafts group • Arts in schools are main source
Experience of planning or surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing work to propose a Nature Reserve (Ifton Meadows) • Sewerage Infrastructure Assessment – a campaign to change sewerage operators (from Welsh Water to Severn Trent Water)
Reasons for wanting to be part of ARC	<i>'To raise awareness of the need to act together to achieve resolution of the issues raised above, and to help create enthusiasm among the residents for the Parish Plan and Action Plan projects.'</i>
Thoughts on the arts project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want to project a positive image for the Parish Plan/Action Plan process • Want a genuinely consultative and developmental project, in which the artist works closely with the Steering Committee and local residents, to develop strands/priorities as they emerge • Would like the artist's work to be of sufficient quality and appropriate format to be retained as an historical record of the creation of the Parish Plan, including the nature of local aspirations at the time.

The Artist

Name	Mark Wood
Artform practice	Multi-media work, including photography, video, design and text, with special interest in using digital and interactive technologies. Has worked on public art commissions and community arts projects, with track record of engaging young people in creative projects. Produced multi-media events and permanent artworks, including a project in Bridgnorth District.
Initial project ideas (in application)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that consultation is at the heart of the project, through using images, text and even sound made available on web sites as well as in venues well used by local people • Using the art process as a research tool, and one which will stimulate debate across the community • Ensuring that images and texts are created which express and reflect people's concerns about their local area and what the future might bring
Aims and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To work with local people on 'addressing the fear of new housing developments' • To produce work, through an emphasis on interactive processes • For the work to evolve through collaboration, and promote skills sharing with participants
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced at working in rural settings • Enthusiastic about the potential of events for creating excellent opportunities for interaction across different sectors of the community

The Project

Project title	The Big Event
Artist days	50
Summary of programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation through research, site visits and discussions with key contacts, including members of the Parish Group • Working with the local primary school to create images for a large mural representing St Martins • Photos and video footage of children and young people talking about the area (their likes, dislikes, hopes and aspirations) • Creation of a film, based on interviews with children and their artwork: in DVD format • Large community event at St Martins Community Centre, 13/01/06, to include exhibition of artworks and film projection • Help with design of the Parish Plan questionnaire, and regular contributions to local newsletter and press releases
Who was involved (main target group/s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils at Ifton Heath Primary School (two classes of 30 pupils, plus input of drawings from reception class) • Seven members of staff at IH Primary School • St Martins Youth Club (8 – 10 young people attended for six sessions; mainly younger teens) • Families of children and young people who were involved in the project • Attendance at Big Event in January 06 estimated 200 - 250

CHANGES TO THE PROJECT	BECAUSE THE ARTIST HAD STARTED WITH NO FIXED IDEA ABOUT WHAT THE PROJECT MIGHT DO, THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO IT IN TERMS OF CONCEPT.
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media coverage was handled well between artist and parish group: • Regular drip-feeding of information to local press and via parish newsletter kept people informed • The Big Event was originally intended to take place before Xmas 2005, but was postponed to avoid a clash with a large community event in Oswestry • The Big Event was covered by BBC Shropshire and attracted considerable media attention (copy articles provided)

3.3 BOMERE HEATH

The Parish

Location	Shrewsbury
Population size	3,000 plus Bomere Heath itself approx 1,500 Rest spread over 13 small settlements
Area covered	6 miles north – south; 7 miles east - west
Main characteristics of parish area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bomere Heath is the main service village for the surrounding area and scattered small settlements • Lies in a predominantly rural setting, with a small industrial unit to the south of the parish • Some areas have rather higher levels of older residents • A range of community activities offered in Bomere itself, based at the Village Hall for the most part: WI, Women's Club, Arts Club, Drama Club, Photography Society, IT Training, Brownies, Youth Club, Tennis Club, Football Club (senior and junior), Cricket Club (senior and junior) • Another village hall in Fitz, although this is smaller and has far fewer activities because of low population numbers and dispersed communities • Parish Council tries to be inclusive as far as possible in involving the wider community: hold their meetings in different locations across the parish
Specific interest and concerns	Main concerns for the parish overall are transport, lack of affordable housing, healthcare provision, social exclusion of some residents in the more isolated areas, need for more opportunities for recreation
Experience of community arts work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refurbishment of village hall was made possible through an Arts Lottery Grant: to improve facilities for drama and other art forms; also a local artist designed and made tiles for the porch floor • A play was commissioned and performed, relating to the history of people from the village • The drama group has commissioned and performed a play to commemorate the Battle of Shrewsbury (1403) in 2003: presented at the Music Hall (venue in Shrewsbury), and featured on BBC local news

EXPERIENCE OF PLANNING OR SURVEYS	PARISH COUNCIL HAS CARRIED OUT A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT SURVEYS OVER THE YEARS, IN ITS OWN RIGHT AND IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SHREWSBURY AND ATCHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL.
Reasons for wanting to be part of ARC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To bring something new to presenting the aims of the Parish Plan • To create more interest in local community in responding to the Parish Plan survey • To help in presenting the final version of the Plan
Thoughts on the arts project	Apart from wanting help with the above reasons, the parish group was open to suggestion and guidance from the artist etc.

The Artist

Name	Dave Reeves
Artform practice	Creative writing/literature development. Work covers multi-disciplinary forms, including performance poetry, reminiscence, work with adults recovering from mental illness, writer in residence with youth projects, text for public art projects, lyrics, wide range of community writing. Has worked in Shropshire Hills AONB.
Initial project ideas (in application)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An ongoing and evolving body of work based on original creative writing, reminiscence and community history • Working with young people, as interviewers and creators of reportage, to engage with older community residents • Researching into existing texts and providing creative writing surgeries • Exploring the themes of identity and sense of place with local people <p>Envisaged the end product comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a publication and/or a performance of work to précis topics and opinions collected • a community poem written by himself to articulate concerns and reactions of those consulted
Aims and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To engage diverse groups on their own terms • To enable local people to articulate both histories and futures relating to Bomere Heath • To work in an inter-generational way • To encourage creative writing locally, through using a variety of locations (including libraries, pubs, other local community spaces)
Other	Keen to explore personal memory, identity and diverse histories amongst Bomere Heath's communities, as a basis for developing thoughts on the future, and feeding into the Parish Plan process. Track record in working in rural settings.

The Project

Project title	Bomere Heath Ballads
Artist days	20
Summary of programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and site visits to gather context and history for the project • Work with primary schools: Bomere School to interview older people in sheltered accommodation; create own written pieces, including production of Powerpoint presentations • Pupils also interviewed their own parents/families, on memories and thoughts about life in the parish • Using input from pupils to create 'collective' poems and writing • Produced creative writing for displays, and presentation to school fayre in June and in Village Hall • Preparations for producing and publishing a booklet of reminiscence, anecdote and original poetic commentary • Mini-residence: Poet in the Post Office and planned Poet in the Pub, to engage with other local groups and individuals
Who was involved (main target group/s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two primary schools: Year 1, Key Stage 1 group; two Year 6, Key Stage 2 groups • Parents, carers and families for primary children • Elderly residents from Chapel Close sheltered accommodation • Other elderly residents from the parish • Wider community: through 'Poet in Post Office' residency; open sessions in local pub/s
Changes to the project	None, although the project is not yet completed (as at 26 March 06)
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadcasts on BBC Radio Shropshire (June 05 and January 06) • Some local press coverage from press releases • Articles in the Parish Magazine

3.4 MORVILLE

The Parish

Location	5 miles west of Bridgnorth
Population size	542
Main characteristics of parish area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A rural area although close to, and partially defined by its relationship with, Bridgnorth which is also the location for nearly all local services (Morville has no shop or post office). • The parish is a strange shape partially encircling, and being encircled by, other parishes. It comprises five settlements, the largest of which is Morville (pop. 300) which is bisected by the busy A458. • Village School in Morville • There is a village hall and a pub, both of which are substantially used by "outsiders" (ie: Bridgnorth-based organisations and passing traffic respectively). • Historic buildings: the Church and Morville Hall which is a National Trust property

Specific interest and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speeding traffic • Maintaining village school • Crime prevention • Expansion of local quarry • Need for agricultural diversification • District councils housing plans
Experience of community arts work	None
Experience of planning or surveys	Morville School carried out a survey re: use of playing field (owned by Parish Council) as a prerequisite of funding application for equipment
Reasons for wanting to be part of ARC	To work with village school, perhaps explore history of the parish and also to attract secondary school age children to voice their concerns.
Thoughts on the arts project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore history of the parishes • Promote environmental awareness/ need to recycle • Look at ways of providing activities for young people within the community • Help address concerns of older people within the parish

The Artist

Name	Ian Russell
Artform practice	Music and theatre, more recently moving towards greater use of visual media to augment soundscapes.
Initial project ideas (in application)	<p>"40 winks".</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 or more individuals/groups to take a photograph of the same pre-selected vista viewed at the same hour each week for 40 weeks • In parallel, the community to record sound, such as voices, music, background noise, poetry . People to be invited to express their personal views of life in the parish to supply the film's soundtrack.
Aims and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To engage the population collectively by recording individual viewpoints and commentaries to produce a 'time lapse' documentary film and soundtrack unique to the parish. • To create a permanent, unique recording of the lives and thoughts of dozens of contributors • Parish-wide dissemination of contemporary skills and arts practices
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lives and works in rural area • Community arts experience

The Project

Project title	40 Winks
Artist days	30
Summary of programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation through site visits, meetings and presentations to WI and Parish Plan coffee morning. • Briefing of individuals personally and through “how to” information packs for producing the 40 photographs • Working with staff and all children (about 60) at Morville School • Recording local sounds and interviews with individuals • “Preview” exhibition of first sets of photographs at the Village Hall 30/11/05 • Permanent exhibition of photographs for Village School • Creation of 10 minute documentary film incorporating sounds and images, some animated – shown 13/3/06 at the Village School
Who was involved (main target group/s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A range of adults from the parish [35 people had cameras of whom 22 completed a full set of photographs] • Morville School – all the children participated in the project re: history and future of the school.
Changes to the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some delay caused by unsuccessful sponsorship deal re: photographic equipment. Resulted in some scaling down (couldn't provide all children at Morville School with individual cameras).
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some publicity in Parish magazine, largely artist's copy • Technical challenges in production – transferring images from one format to another was time-consuming but largely overcome. • “This has really opened my eyes to the possibilities of working with an artist – but there is more to it than I thought.”

3.5 RUSHBURY

The Parish

Location	8 miles north of Church Stretton
Population size	547
Area covered	9 sq km approx
Main characteristics of parish area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural area with scattered population: two main villages and outlying farms and hamlets, bisected by busy B4371. • There is a primary school, a village hall and two pubs but otherwise very few facilities – no shop or post office. • An area of outstanding natural beauty.
Specific interest and concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural diversification following foot & mouth • Traffic and road safety • Local amenities (shops and transport) • Service provision for older residents • Maintaining high quality of local natural environment
Experience of community arts work	Village Hall is sometimes used as an arts venue and other well attended one off arts and social events have taken place, particularly round the millennium and the jubilee.
Experience of planning or surveys	Millennium Green Survey had high response rate; reasonable level of interest and involvement in the parish planning process.

REASONS FOR WANTING TO BE PART OF ARC	TO HELP ENGAGE THE FULL RANGE OF THE LOCAL CONSTITUENCY INCLUDING THOSE WHO MAY NOT FEEL THEY HAVE (ENOUGH OF) A VOICE. EG: YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE ELDERLY
Thoughts on the arts project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Want inspiration and to break down hierarchical and long established barriers to social engagement. • Particularly want to work with the primary school

The Artist

Name	Shaun McCarthy
Artform practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creative writing - poet and playwright
Initial project ideas (in application)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drama and script-based first person writing, based on local issues and possibly leading to performance; some groups contributing to exhibition of their writing supported by landscape and portrait photography.
Aims and objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reach the parts that mere fact and opinion gathering can't • To invite people to express themselves as individuals rather than as survey respondents • To develop an understanding of how the community sees itself and its future
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • extensive community arts and arts in education experience • personal experience of working on his own local parish plan

The Project

Project title	4 projects altogether: the adult writing group, the youth drama group, the primary school project and People and Place – the project based on existing photographs.
Artist days	30
Summary of programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Drama Group • Writing group with adults • Primary Schools Project – pupils at Rushbury school plus parents assisting children on “what we like/hate about Rushbury” (a child’s eye view of the parish). Produced poetry, captions and photographs taken by a photographer following a shooting schedule made by the children. • People and Places – based on captioning existing photographs (taken by Geraldine Davies) which illustrate all the homes and their inhabitants in the parish in 2001. The captions are written by the residents and incorporate reflections and memories of the time/passage of time and the place. An exhibition was held on 9/11/05 and generated further interest. Second exhibition arranged for spring 2006. Shaun has also made arrangements to digitise the full set of these photographs.
Who was involved (main target group/s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth group - “The God Squad” 2. Adults 3. Children of primary school age and their parents 4. The whole community

CHANGES TO THE PROJECT	AFTER THE SUMMER BREAK THE YOUTH DRAMA GROUP AND THE ADULT CREATIVE WRITING GROUP LAPSED. THE 'PEOPLE AND PLACE' PROJECT THEN TOOK A MUCH HIGHER PROFILE, LEADING TO AN EXHIBITION IN THE AUTUMN OF 2005 WHICH THEN GAVE RISE TO A FURTHER ROUND OF WRITING AND EXHIBITION. THIS PROJECT AND THE PRIMARY SCHOOLS PROJECT HAVE BOTH PROVIDED ENERGY AND CONTENT FOR THE WEBSITE
Other	Some local press coverage and interest from the libraries and education authorities. Extensive coverage on the village website. (www.rushbury.org.uk)

SECTION 4

OUTCOMES FOR EACH PROJECT

4.1 Introduction

In this section we will focus on the extent to which the four arts projects have achieved the overall core objective of enhancing the Parish Planning process.

4.2 The 'good' Parish Plan

In 2000, the Government's Rural White Paper, '*Our Countryside – the Future*', established the purpose of a Parish Plan is to:

"... set out a vision of what is important, how new development can best be fitted in, the design and quality standards it should meet, how to preserve valued local features and to map out the facilities which the community needs to safeguard for the future. Plans should identify key facilities and services, set out the problems that need to be tackled and demonstrate how distinctive character and features can be preserved."

Overall, a 'good' Parish Plan is an holistic document, covering all aspects of parish life, and the successful ones lead to:

- enhanced community spirit
- improved local governance
- tangible benefits to the parish
- new partnerships with higher tier authorities and strategic partnerships.

(source: Countryside Agency's guidance and report of the What Makes a Good Parish Plan? Working Group – op.cit., 1.3.1)

The same report also states, amongst overall learning points related to success, that good plans are characterised by:

- **working together** (reflecting the views of the whole settlement)
- **securing community ownership**
- **maintaining a forward focus** (not merely recording the current situation).

As a number of indicators of success will only be evidenced after the conclusion of the ARC Project (including improvements to the parish facilities and infrastructure; enhanced partnerships with other tiers of government; improved local governance), for the purposes of this evaluation, we will focus on the evidence of impacts as set out below. The evidence source is derived from the Parish evaluation questionnaires and exit interviews carried out with the lead parish group representatives.

4.2 ST MARTINS

Baseline/starting point	An active parish group, with a track record in survey work, although limited experience of involvement with arts projects
Communications	<p>These have been uniformly good and effective from both sides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the parish group members were responsive, supportive and well organised • the artist was punctilious and thorough in all his dealings with the project in all aspects • both sides did what they said they were going to do and kept in touch throughout the project

IMPACT ON PARISH PLANS: COMMUNITY SPIRIT/WORKING TOGETHER	<p>An unequivocally positive response to this question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has helped to reinvigorate community spirit and brought people together in a communal event, actively involving many • Has fostered a sense of being part of something bigger in the life of the village • People now want to make more films and carry out further projects, especially focusing on the older residents
Impact on Parish Plans: forward focus	<p>A positive yes to this question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This was a key factor for the parish group from outset, and helped to influence the artist selection: did not want a Domesday Book approach • Artist has always been forwarding looking throughout the project, looking to the next stage and what this might bring to the parish plan • Although the DVD provides a snapshot of village life, it is all about the future of St Martins
Impact on Parish Plans: community ownership	<p>A positive yes to this question</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The arts project enabled them to reach those who would never have got involved with the parish plan process – children, young people as well as their families • With the wider events and publicity, they feel that they have reached a good range of ages • Has engaged the imagination of many in the local community (feedback from direct comments to the parish group)
Impact on Parish Plans: tangible benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has created tools for use in developing consultation further for the parish (the DVD, mural and images) • Has improved and enlivened the questionnaire for the Parish Plan, through use of artist to design elements • Has created works of art which are excellent in their own right and improved the understanding and value of the arts across the community
Impact on Parish Plans: other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Big Event has made people think laterally about problems and solutions • It has enabled people to see issues through the eyes of others: the concerns of young people (over safety, bullying etc) came as a surprise to many adults, and helped with mutual understanding • It has got the communities in St Martins more actively interested in planning: there was a very good turnout for the launch of the Local Development Framework (spatial/land use planning) by Oswestry Borough Council at an event in St Martins

4.3 BOMERE HEATH

This project has given rise to differing views amongst the Parish Group of its success. These are reflected below.

Baseline/starting	An active group, with experience of a range of arts projects and carrying out surveys in the community
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both artist and parish group have each reported problems in this area, and feel that it has had some impact on both the quality and the effectiveness of the project overall • The lack of a physical base for the project, where information could have been made available and exchanged between artist and parish group has compounded communication difficulties • There have been failures of technology (email, mobile) which have impeded communication
Impact on Parish Plans: community spirit/working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two positive responses: fostered positive relationships between children and older residents; got people talking together about their parish • One qualified positive: has been able to bring people together at some events, including at Post Office and school fete • Two negative responses, about the group's difficulties in contacting the artist and in not having more sessions to get people together to discuss the project
Impact on Parish Plans: forward focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overall view that the arts project had not contributed to a forward focus: attributed to perceptions of artist's own interest in history, heritage and performance poetry, and the difficulty of getting any consistent views from a widely dispersed parish, with many different communities
Impact on Parish Plans: community ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three positive responses: felt that artist had engaged people more directly than the Parish Group would have managed in its own right • Two negative responses, mainly because of perceptions of lack of overall levels of activity
Impact on Parish Plans: tangible benefits	<p>An overall negative response because of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recent delivery of questionnaire and need to collate responses • lack of knowledge of what the final product of the arts project will be
Impact on Parish Plans: other	As the project is still incomplete, the full impacts will only be made clear after this evaluation report has been finalised.

4.4 MORVILLE

Baseline/starting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small parish with no previous experience of community arts work • Limited experience in carrying out survey work. • Very small parish steering group of 2 - 3 people
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parish representatives have reported problems in this area • Artist has also reported technical problems on his side.
Impact on Parish Plans: community spirit/working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current perception is that there has been little impact here • The nature of the art form and the project meant that individuals were working alone to create the photo sequences while the size, demography and topography of the parish did not provide a substantial social infrastructure to maintain momentum between the artist's visits. This was exacerbated by the loss of momentum over the summer which has been noted by all the ARC projects • The work with the school has generated a stronger collective experience, but this is focused as much on the school itself (which has a catchment area larger than the parish) as on the parish plan.
Impact on Parish Plans: forward focus	Very limited at the time of the evaluation. However, the ARC project was completed before the parish plan was written and the artist used the Parish Plan questionnaire as a basis for individual interviews which formed part of the soundtrack for the film. There are suggestions that the results of both exercises may reinforce one another.
Impact on Parish Plans: community ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were feelings that at the time of the first evaluation interviews, it was too soon to tell. The parish plan questionnaires were being collected for analysis and the '40 Winks' showing had not yet taken place. • Comments following the first showing of '40 Winks' suggest that a sense of ownership may arise more strongly from further showings than from the process of making it.
Impact on Parish Plans: tangible benefits	See forward focus above
Impact on Parish Plans: other	The active parish planning group is extremely small and has been hard pressed to manage both the ARC project and the planning process. The two have been running in parallel rather than feeding strongly off one another. The overall expectation is that the ARC project will prove to be beneficial in the long run.

4.5 RUSHBURY

Baseline/starting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small parish with some very active individuals. • Some arts and planning experience • The parish planning process was almost complete when the ARC project began
Communications	Generally good in both directions
Impact on Parish Plans: community spirit/working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The projects reached a wider community than the parish plan itself, both geographically (beyond the parish limits) and demographically (reaching young people). It also provided content for the website, brought the plan to life and continues to keep people engaged • Part of the Parish plan was about improving communications and inclusiveness – <i>“we recognised that the Parish Planning process couldn’t include people under voting age in a formal way and the artist working with the school got people thinking about it and validated the plan as the results were consonant with the adult issues”</i>. • Children’s work was exhibited at the School and at the local Flower and Produce show and then again with People and Places. • Exhibiting ‘People and Places’ energised people and resulted in more signing up for People and Places round 2.
Impact on Parish Plans: forward focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ARC projects reinforced the thoughts and feelings which the parish planning questionnaire had produced, with a strong emphasis on conserving those aspects of parish life which residents particularly appreciated.
Impact on Parish Plans: community ownership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A strong positive here. The projects have kept the parish plan in the forefront of local attention and have re-connected some local residents with the community • The use of the parish website and magazine to publicise the ARC projects has provided access to information and involvement.
Impact on Parish Plans: tangible benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material for the Village Website • Exhibitions form a permanent record which will be supplemented by putting the 2001 photographs onto CD
Impact on Parish Plans: other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timing: <i>“If Shaun’s work had been done at the same time as the Parish Plan work, it would have given him more leads and a greater interplay between projects. It would have been useful (for him) to have been involved in the survey design. As it is, it’s a parallel process rather than a direct enhancer”</i>. (Parish Group member)

SECTION 5

LEARNING OUTCOMES

5.1 Introduction

This section will draw on the experiences of the different groups involved in the ARC project, and consider the main lessons from their perspectives. We have considered evidence aggregated across the project and have focussed on observations which shed useful light on the achievements and challenges to this complex programme.

All the points made in this section represent the views of all parties to the project, and (with the exception of 5.5) are not the views of the external evaluators. The overall assessment of the project by the evaluators and recommendations follow in Section 6.

5.2 Community Council of Shropshire

5.2.1 Capacity of CCS

- overall, involvement in the arts has not been part of the mainstream for either CCS (or indeed the Parish Groups): the project has required a great deal of rapid learning 'on the job'
- with hindsight, the project manager would have attended more of the initial PG meetings, to check understanding and provide further support and encouragement to the less experienced groups
- the frequency and timings of Steering Group meetings: project manager feels that there should have been more of these (especially between February and September 2005) and that the timing was especially difficult for those PG members in full-time employment

5.2.2 Views on capacity of Parish Groups

- project manager believes that overall capacity is very dependent on the background, confidence, prior experience and personality of the group members
- performance was affected by the stages of other Parish Planning activities and whether parishes had worked with artists or in other community-wide projects before ARC
- it was easier for the larger parishes involved to manage the process, because of the strength and number of existing local networks and the larger pool of additional volunteers whose help they could enlist

5.2.3 Timescale

- although the timescale extended considerably beyond what was originally intended, the project manager feels that this has, on the whole, benefited the programme
- some issues and problems with timescale, however, are felt to be more about individual artist or community ways of working
- the drift in timescale has led to some loss of momentum and energy in projects, with a particular slowing down over the summer period in 2005
- there is a general understanding that such projects almost always take longer than anticipated at the outset

5.2.4 Resources

- the budget has been of the right size for the whole programme
- artist travel expenses have been higher than anticipated, but this was mainly attributable to the appointment of four artists from outside of the county
- in future arts projects, the CCS would certainly consider allocating an expenses float to artists, to avoid delays in payment of items which need to be purchased up front and to defray personal expenditure

5.2.5 Communications

- some communication problems arose because of changes in personnel involved in the Parish Groups (through illness or when individuals who were present at initiation stood down from involvement subsequently), and news of this did not reach the CCS quickly enough
- there were notable differences in communication skills between the four artists, and this did contribute to ease or difficulty in understanding throughout the projects
- overall, the project manager felt that communications improved as the project went on, as artists, PGs and the CCS got to know each other better

5.2.6 Managing expectations

- projects would have benefited from greater clarity about expectations from the start of the programme, which would have identified the support needs of the PGs in particular

5.2.7 The main successes of the ARC programme

- achieving a real step change in understanding of how the arts can be used in genuine community consultation: convincing the PGs that it would really help with engaging a wide section of local people
- that there will be practical outcomes in each of the parishes as a result of the project, even if the ambition levels differ
- the very careful way in which the artist selection process was designed and delivered, leaving PGs feeling that they had active ownership of the project from the start

5.2.8 Did it meet its overall aims and objectives?

- **using the arts to engage local communities in planning:** yes, by and large
- **testing the effectiveness of the arts as a consultation process:** yes, absolutely
- **fostering a greater appreciation of the value of the arts in understanding local concerns:** yes, by and large
- **learning and sharing skills:** to some extent; more opportunities for the artists to meet as a self-supporting group would have been helpful in this
- **ensuring that parish planning reflects views and needs of all in local community:** only partially successful. Projects did not reach all excluded groups, including travellers, farming communities or disabled people, for example. In future, the project manager would be more directive in setting defined target groups. Two projects did have some success in reaching farming communities (Rushbury and Morville).

5.2.9 Other observations

- in the project as originally set up, the presence of district Arts Development Officers was intended to provide another layer of advice and support. With the departure of Bridgnorth's ADO, this element was lost to the programme. Any future arts projects should be developed in closer collaboration with ADOs, who can help both artists and communities
- having an experienced community artist in the original project Steering Group, greatly helped with designing procedures and understanding the perspectives of artists.

5.3 Artists

5.3.1 The recruitment and selection process

- This was felt to be an interesting approach, with some merits, including a good interview process carried out by the Steering Group
- The 'cattle market' process, where candidates were on show for prospective Parish Groups was not generally welcomed, even by those who were successful. Artists found it tiring, did not really have enough time to set up their presentations, and viewed it as a 'serious unpaid day's work'.

5.3.2 Project management by CCS

- there was considerable consensus in praise for the way that the project was managed by CCS, and the personal support and input of the project manager
- artists particularly appreciated the 'arms length' principle, and valued the sense of trust in how they would organise themselves without 'interference' from the CCS
- the project manager was commended for his ability to step in and sort out problems when requested
- Steering Group meetings were not always as productive as they might have been
- the artists would have valued more opportunities to come together to share experiences
- there was concern among artists over the long gap between SG meetings (February to September 2005), which left them feeling isolated and concerned about whether CCS felt sufficiently involved or in control of the programme

5.3.3 Working with the Parish Groups

- experiences varied between the four parishes: the differences can be attributed to the previous experience of PGs in working with artists, the effectiveness and efficiency of PG members, the variable quality and skill in communication levels between the artists, plus an intangible that might best be expressed as 'personal chemistry'
- where projects were particularly successful, PG members put a great deal of time and energy into supporting their artist, including sorting out practical problems, and were able to gain a clear sense of purpose and direction for what he was trying to achieve
- where projects were less successful, communications were problematic or patchy (including the lack of a central site or with a dedicated mobile phone that is not used effectively), roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined, it was difficult to communicate creative ideas and contacts outside the PG itself were hard to make
- hard-to-reach groups in smaller parishes were more likely to be a few individuals rather than a critical mass of people

5.3.4 Timescale

- overall, it was felt that the extended timescale enabled the projects to develop their own life, explore ideas and gave artists the opportunity to get to know their host communities better which countered the concerns around delays. In spite of this, two of the artists felt that a more concentrated timescale would have been preferable, particularly with reference to incorporating the output into the parish planning process
- for most artists the timescale also meant that it was possible to manage their input around other projects outside ARC, rather than having to focus solely on one project
- two of the projects (Bomere Heath and Morville) did find that there was not enough dedicated time to develop an arts project which could be fully and coherently linked to the parallel parish planning process, given communities which had little previous arts involvement and therefore limited "ready-made" engagement.
- all artists felt that the dip in or cessation of activity over the summer period in 2005 produced a loss of overall momentum and projects needed to be refreshed (or indeed abandoned) in the autumn

5.3.5 Budget and resources

- the allocation of days and materials expenses were at the right level for the individual projects: all artists made the point that they are used to working within agreed resources
- management of cashflow by the artists on expenses caused some problems, and particularly for travel costs which exceeded the allocated amount

5.3.6 Project strengths and successes

- helping volunteers to organise themselves, and giving a focus and structure for making progress
- reaching out to people who would not otherwise have been engaged in parish planning, particularly children and young people below voting age
- creating tangible and usable creative 'products' (exhibitions, DVD, events etc) which will help to stimulate further debate in the parishes
- securing good media coverage for the projects (including local radio, television, press), to help publicise and promote the parishes themselves as well as the artists
- generating positive energy and enthusiasm across local communities
- giving local people fun and enjoyment through the arts

5.3.7 Project problems and weaknesses

- difficulties in aligning timescale between arts projects and producing and distributing parish plan questionnaires – some loss of synergy here
- lost opportunity in one project for the local school to make better use of artist in working across the curriculum (could have supported a parish mapping project, for example)
- the time taken to make initial contacts and gain introductions to others in the parishes
- lack of networks, especially in the smaller parishes, which made it all too easy to fall back on usual community routes of reaching people through the schools
- challenges in being able to 'read' or understand the community, which can often not appear very coherent or transparent to any outsider
- some tensions in having to create a balance between being open to what the parish felt it wanted from the arts project and the requirement to deliver to some specific project deadlines or timescales
- logistics of organising meetings at times when people were available or the transport problems for young people who were not able to take part in the drama project in one parish

5.3.8 Impact on the parish plans

- all projects have helped to raise the profile of the parish planning process, including through media coverage
- they have helped to engage the public imagination in ways in which a questionnaire on its own would never have achieved
- parents of children, as well as children themselves, have been actively drawn into the process
- events in all projects have brought people out of their homes. Some got communities working together in collaborative ways; others began, individually or collectively, to see their locality and its qualities, from a wider range of viewpoints.
- where the timing and synchronisation allowed, the projects have enabled issues to be raised which will feature in the community responses to the questionnaires

5.3.9 Lessons for artists and communities

- **Artists:** learn to work to 'local time'
- do not be too clever or challenging, but make the approach inclusive and accessible, so that people involved in a project really understand what is happening
- communicate clearly and directly at all times and be professional in all aspects of work, including being on time for meetings and doing exactly what has been promised
- **Communities:** do not be passive if things are not easily understood – find out what the artist means and ask questions
- be flexible, have faith in the artist and be prepared to get involved
- view the arts project as a learning opportunity, and understand that there is no right or wrong way to respond to an artist
- ensure that a real sense of ownership of the project is built up, by being active participants throughout the process
- need for a slightly more honest/realistic view of what a community as a whole might want, rather than what a small energetic group think they want.

5.3.10 Impacts on professional development or practice

- needing to learn to adapt working practices to a looser, more dispersed type of community, including finding different ways of disseminating the end 'product'
- one artist will be publishing work in a website for the first time
- continuous improvement in learning how to sift and filter material for use in the end 'product'
- two artists improved their animation skills in producing film and DVD

5.4 Parish Groups

The views of the Parish Groups on the extent to which the arts projects have contributed to the success of their own parish planning processes have been covered in detail in section 4. Here we report on a number of other issues.

5.4.1 Capacity and capability

- PGs needed to take on board the fact that these projects bring a considerable administrative burden
- opportunities to network more with other parish groups would have helped in terms of sharing expertise and providing mutual support
- more volunteers are needed to help spread the workload
- additional input (guidance and advice) from both CCS and the local authority Arts Development Officers would have been useful
- Steering Group meetings should have taken place out of office hours
- the volume of paperwork generated (and the jargon in which much of it was written) proved daunting for the PG members

5.4.2 Working with artists

- on the whole this has been an enjoyable and fruitful process, which has helped local communities to get a more positive understanding of what the arts can do for them
- the importance of ease of communication between PG members and the artists can not be overstated: many of the problems noted can be attributed to failures to communicate
- the parishes are now keen to take part in other projects with artists

5.4.3 Successes of the projects

- involving the PG representatives closely in the selection process for the artists, and giving them a real sense of ownership and joint decision-making
- getting communities engaged enthusiastically with the arts, after some initial resistance
- creating works of art as a legacy of ARC, and which are especially significant to their local host communities
- bringing the views of children and young people to the attention of adults, and ensuring that these are fed into thinking on the parish plans
- making use of ICT as a way of bringing dispersed communities together
- serendipity in the artists meeting up with people in the parishes who had a particular skill, experience or history to contribute to both the arts project or in integrating these more effectively with the parish planning process
- having interesting outside perspectives brought to bear on parish life
- arts projects are not constrained in consultation by having to be sterile or statistically representative, and are able to respond on a more human, individual level
- willingness of the CCS to help and support wherever possible
- having the project made available to them through subsidy from the Arts Council England and CCS, which freed them from the need for fundraising

5.4.4 Project problems and weaknesses

- the artist selection process was found to be slightly rushed by some of the PG representatives and the venue was not fully accessible
- trying to counter apathy and cynicism in local communities, where people think that nothing they do will make any difference to their lives
- lack of confidence among some local people, who are wary of putting themselves forward or are embarrassed at thinking they will not know what to do
- concern expressed by some PG members that the project leaders and external evaluators tend not to understand the starting point of many parish volunteers
- complexity of the evaluation process and what are felt to be excessive demands on unpaid volunteers in providing information
- hard work for artists in getting to grips with isolated and dispersed communities
- communication problems with some artists, who were perceived as being 'hard-to-reach'
- much more administration and hands on management required by the PGs than had been anticipated, and a shortage of volunteers to carry out the work needed
- a shorter timescale (of around six months) would have been better at maintaining momentum
- the slippage in delivery of the arts projects and co-ordinating the linkages with the parish planning process
- perceived lack of understanding in some artists about the ways in which rural communities function
- some lack of clarity over the artistic process and aims and objectives driving the artists' work
- concerns over how the energy and interest generated by the projects can be sustained in the longer term: they would like to have a proper exit strategy

5.5 External Evaluators

5.5.1 The process

- the timescale slippage made it difficult for the evaluators to maintain an up-to-date overview of progress across the four projects
- although the evaluators are experienced at working in rural settings across England (and have indeed carried out other projects in Shropshire), they recognise that they had underestimated the impact of the proposed approach to evaluation on the parish volunteers
- the site visits and observation sessions were difficult to plan and manage within the extended timescale, and should have been carried out more formally where possible
- the project overall would have benefited from some early training or coaching input from the evaluators, working directly with the PGs: this would have identified the problems of capacity and understanding at an earlier stage, and clarified their role in evaluating ARC
- communications with artists has not always been easy or straightforward, and it has proved difficult to get hold of information at times

5.5.2 Outputs and outcomes

- the range of contacts and evidence obtained from documents, discussions and interviews, has provided a clear sense of ARC's major achievements, and are sufficiently robust to form a view on the major lessons from this pilot project
- the outputs in terms of supporting the parish planning **process** are clearly stated and understood by the participants
- the eventual outcomes and impacts, in terms of what the four parish plans actually deliver for their communities, are outside the timescale and scope of this study.

5.6 The parish comparator

The parish of Whittington was suggested by CCS as a useful comparator, against which to assess the impact of the ARC project. Whittington is an historic village two miles from Oswestry; its centrepiece is a ruined castle which attracts tourists and is run by Whittington Castle Preservation Trust and Friends of Whittington Castle. The parish has a population of 2,491 (2001 Census) and is made up of five settlements: Hengoed, Lower Frankton, Babbinswood, Park Hall and Whittington.

Whittington is relatively well serviced by public transport being on an Oswestry - Shrewsbury bus route and three miles from Gobowen railway station, though most people use private cars. There is good access to clubs and sports and social facilities: five pubs, senior citizens' club, multi-purpose Community Centre, cricket club, bowling green, rugby club, showground football club and an athletic track. Whittington Church has an active congregation and there is a Church of England Primary School.

The Three Trees Shop and Post Office are run by a local family and provide essential services to the community. The shop employs local people who take interest in the customers and share valuable information that supports the local community. The Post Office has a notice board and welcomes the display of information.

5.6.1 How Whittington developed its parish plan

- the parish plan representative gave a presentation at the Parish Annual meeting and asked those interested to come forward
- four volunteers responded and the Planning Group co-opted four others, ensuring that representation was secured from most areas of the parish
- the Planning Group also included a 16 year old member, as they were keen to hear the views of younger residents and to have a credible direct link with them.
- a questionnaire was distributed to young people aged between 10 and 17 through the Primary School and Lakelands School. 89 questionnaires were returned, with 38 % completed by 11 year olds.

5.6.2 The extent to which the Whittington process fostered community spirit

- yes, in some ways: they adopted a positive approach, and were keen to ask questions about what local people liked about the area
- the primary school got involved with the children's questionnaires and allowed time for this in school
- the senior school also encouraged active participation (in spite of being outside the parish boundary)
- having Whittington Castle as a village centre piece and an active church also helps to encourage community spirit
- the Planning Group's youth representative involved other young people in distributing and collecting the children's and youth questionnaires

5.6.3 The sense of local ownership of the parish plan

- the Planning Group felt that this was there from the outset, and showed itself in the willingness of people to take part

5.6.4 The extent to which some community groups were not involved

- there were probably two small settlements on the outer fringes of the parish that might not have felt really included in the process

5.6.5 The usefulness and presence of local networks in parish planning

- although a number of local networks was interested in the parish plan (including farmers, church groups, Women's Institute and parent and toddler groups), they did not have the time to get actively involved

5.6.7 Other observations

- any community embarking on parish planning needs a good mix of people on the steering group - doers, thinkers and planners – adding up to enough energy to carry out the tasks
 - overall, one individual (at least) needs to drive it otherwise the process drifts. It is important, however, for people not to dominate such voluntary groups, or people stop working together. There needs to be sufficient time for everyone to catch up and for skills to emerge and be used
 - if certain core skills are not found in the group, it is wise to buy these in
 - analysing responses to questionnaire takes a great deal of time
 - networking with other parishes to review their experience is essential: share what went well, so that other places do not reinvent the wheel
 - there are often unforeseen spin-off benefits: a question on healthy living provoked such a strong response from the community that the Primary Care Trust will act on the issues raised; the youth representative on the Planning Group has had his experience formally acknowledged in his records of attainment; additional youth activity which had begun before the PP process got a boost from the involvement of young people
 - networking with other parishes: the support of CCS officers was found to be invaluable in guiding and assisting the whole process.
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SECTION 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

Looking at the ARC project overall, we believe that it has been largely successful in meeting its original aims and objectives. This section will summarise the main achievements and set out a number of recommendations for CCS and its partners.

6.2 The real strengths

CCS invested in the ARC programme as a means of testing the value of using innovative, arts-based approaches to community consultation. In terms of the process of engagement with local people across the four parishes, we feel that the artists have reached into the heart of communities and drawn out a deeper response than would have been elicited by more traditional methods of community planning.

The positive statements from the Parish Groups show that this approach has worked for them. It is certainly true that two projects have had a greater visible impact than the others (Rushbury and St Martins), and much of this is due to a combination of methodology, size of project and population, effective working methods and a strong 'personal chemistry' between the artists and the Parish Groups. Nonetheless, for both Bomere Heath and Morville, there have been a good number of positive contacts and events, through which key groups in the community have contributed their views to be fed in to the development of their Parish Plans.

The effectiveness of the CCS and the skills in project management of its co-ordinator have been a real benefit to the programme overall. He brought to his task a positive mix of supervision, direction and support, tempered with an 'arms length' approach which was valued by artists and Parish Groups alike.

The artists have brought vision and imagination to their work in the community and in all cases will leave the parishes with a better understanding and appreciation of the arts. They will also be leaving more tangible evidence of their contribution, through the creation of works of art (DVD, writing, film, photographs...), all of which are a positive reflection of local identity and distinctiveness.

The enthusiasm and commitment of the Parish Groups has been commendable, and particularly in those without prior experience of working with artists. The individuals have given freely of their time and energies, and have actively helped to integrate the artists into their own communities.

All of the artists in the project have gained in terms of learning: they have been working in a way that, while analogous to other forms of community art work, is relatively new for them and the work has also prompted new artistic skill development or extended existing knowledge and practice.

The presence of artists in the parishes has helped to encourage some real changes in perception within the communities, especially in terms of awareness of the viewpoints, interests and concerns held by others that the projects have brought to the surface. This has been especially notable in bringing the views of children and young people to the attention of adults.

6.3 Challenges to the project

The ARC project has been less successful in working with the so-called 'hard-to-reach' groups. Although it has undoubtedly been effective and dynamic with children, young people, their families and some older residents, the CCS had originally hoped to see others including people living on estates, disabled people and those with caring responsibilities also actively engaged.

The main problem here is the difficulties caused by the dispersal of communities in rural areas and a lack of what might be termed 'critical mass'. In Shropshire a 'hard-to-reach' group is more likely in reality to be isolated individuals who are not congregated in any particular network or discrete social grouping. This inevitably makes the task of identifying, contacting and engaging such people extraordinarily challenging.

We would also point out that the quality of communication and communication skills has varied considerably between the four projects. This has been due to a number of factors:

- individual artist capacity in communication
- differing levels of communication skills in the Parish Groups
- differing expectations about roles and responsibilities re: communication
- the size of the parishes (population and geographic area), with the presence or lack of formal or social networks and their levels of engagement with the project
- failures in technology
- the presence or lack of a centre or hub for the dissemination of information across parish communities

The expansion of the timescale has brought some disadvantages, the chief of which would appear to be a sense of loss of momentum in most, if not all, four parishes during the summer of 2005. It is fortunate, indeed, that the artists were able to sustain their input throughout, and did not need to abandon ARC because of the pressure of delivery of other contracts.

The Parish Planning process was not always well synchronised with the arts projects, of which Rushbury was the most extreme example (having been completed before the arts project began). This has meant that some of the links between arts process and planning have been somewhat compromised, and that it might be more difficult to embed the elements revealed or discovered by the arts project into the eventual Parish Plan. We also feel that this lack of synchronicity has slightly undermined the accuracy with which we can determine impacts or cause and effect in relating arts activity to the Parish Planning process, and it does mean that the evaluation will not be able to make a comprehensive assessment of this key aspect of the whole programme.

The management and administrative burden on the parish groups needed to be better understood and managed – on a parish by parish basis, and relative to the skills and experience of those involved.

6.4 Recommendations

We have drawn on the lessons of the overall project, including both strengths and weaknesses, and have set out our **key recommendations to the Steering Group** below. This information should also be of interest to both the artists and Parish Groups, and we would hope that the Steering Group will share this report with them.

Area	Recommendation
A Project management	PLEASE NOTE THAT WE USE THE PHRASE 'HOST COMMUNITY' TO REFER TO THE PARISHES, NOT JUST THE PARISH GROUPS, BUT INCLUDING THEM
Project planning	<p>This pilot project demonstrated that combining and synchronising two processes, both of which were relatively unfamiliar to the host communities, presented significant challenges.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. At the outset, establish <u>explicit</u> links between the planning process and the arts project: identify point/s at which the two activities should feed into one another <i>and</i> 2. Actively attempt to <u>maintain</u> these links <i>while</i> 3. Creating <u>contingency plans</u> to enable feed forward/back when lapses of continuity are unavoidable 4. <u>Avoid</u> running projects over the summer unless the issues related to this have been well considered and incorporated into the project plan

	<p>Host Communities</p> <p>5. A greater involvement of the host communities at earlier stages in the process of project development, to feed in concerns and alert them to expectations and capacity issues</p> <p>Target groups</p> <p>6. Note that <u>transport</u> problems in rural areas may constitute significant obstacle to youth participation</p> <p>7. Planning to reach the “hard-to-reach” in low population densities may mean identifying and contacting <u>individuals</u> rather than groups.</p>
Recruitment and selection of artists	<p>The start of the project was delayed due to recruitment problems, but was successful at the second attempt. Artists were enthusiastic about the briefing and interview but not the final selection process.</p> <p>8. Ensure artists’ jobs are widely <u>advertised</u>, through relevant networks, publications and electronically through Arts Jobs</p> <p>9. Use the briefing and interview format employed by ARC as a <u>model of good practice</u>, retaining the inclusion of an artist and local authority representation, and ensuring that any artist is paid properly for his/her time</p> <p>10. Final selection: <u>develop</u> a new model for this stage of recruitment while retaining some element of the “show and share” for the successful artists to present their work to the host communities. Ensure that <u>artists are paid</u> for their work and attendance at extended selection processes.</p>
Process management	<p>This was generally regarded as successful with some qualifications over the issue of meetings.</p> <p>Reinforcing good practice:</p> <p>11. Recognise the ‘hands off but supportive and responsive’ style as a <u>model of good practice</u>. This maintains the ‘arms length principle’, allowing artists to act on their own initiative, while being prepared to step in where required or actively invited</p> <p>Developing the project manager’s role</p> <p>12. Existing good practice may be supplemented <u>by proactive troubleshooting</u> when timescales or momentum slip</p> <p>13. Active management/trouble shooting might also be appropriate if less experienced artists are working on similar projects</p> <p>14. Where the intention or core objective is to involve <u>specific groups</u>, the project manager could be more <u>directive</u> in seeing that this is addressed or amended (if appropriate to the local context)</p> <p>Meetings</p> <p>15. Project manager could <u>attend more host community meetings</u>, particularly in the early stages of a project to gauge progress and help to clarify expectations and requirements</p> <p>16. <u>Change the timing</u> of steering group meetings to accommodate people’s needs better, e.g. by organising more sessions out of office hours</p> <p>17. Ensure that all meetings take place in <u>fully accessible locations</u></p> <p>18. Ensure that meetings <u>drive the project forward</u> in some way, and that they happen frequently enough in the lifecycle to sustain momentum.</p>
B. Communications	<p>19. <u>Test</u> for clarity of understanding and expectations in all parties and especially during the early stages of the project. This will enable support needs to be identified and delivered more rapidly</p> <p>20. Ensure that there are proper <u>mechanisms</u> for exchange of information between artists and host communities, either through a physical or obvious ‘virtual’ base for the project (this could be a widely accessed website, for example)</p>

	<p>21. Ensure that the practicalities of communication are properly addressing by setting and agreeing <u>standards and protocols</u> between all parties at the start of the project and that any changes in these are formally agreed with all relevant parties</p> <p>22. Ensure that there is one main <u>contact person</u> for the project management side and one consistent main contact for the host community side. Where possible, avoid splitting this role between people.</p>
C. Working with Artists	<p>23. Look for evidence of <u>efficiency</u>, <u>organisation</u> and <u>communication skills</u> in the artists during recruitment (in documentation, interview and references)</p> <p>24. Consider providing the artists with a <u>float for expenses</u>, against records of expenditure on agreed items</p> <p>25. Ensure that the artists have sufficient <u>opportunities to meet</u> as a formal part of the project's structure and budget, to communicate, network and share their experiences</p> <p>26. Ensure that artists have access to a <u>physical base and technical resources</u> to support their work. Where this is not available within the host community, some arrangement such as "hot desking" within the commissioning organisation should be considered.</p> <p>27. Artists need to be <u>flexible</u> enough to adapt their working practices to the ways of their host communities</p> <p>28. Make sure that artists <u>explain</u> their work fully to their host communities</p> <p>29. Ensure that the art-form practice is <u>inclusive and accessible</u> to its intended host community</p> <p>30. Artists need to be aware that the host community's most powerful personalities may not be <u>representative</u> of the community as a whole.</p>
D. Working with Host Communities	<p>31. <u>Identify capacity issues</u> in host communities (whether in numbers of people involved, skills or experience) as early as possible, and actively address these as appropriate</p> <p>32. Be aware that communities with little or no experience of arts activities need <u>more time</u> to build up understanding, acceptance and enthusiasm for such programmes</p> <p>33. Host communities should be <u>active</u> and <u>pro-active</u> in working with artists, and need to be prepared to ask questions, take risks and get involved</p> <p>34. Seek to <u>reduce the hands-on management burden</u> for host communities, and actively recruit additional volunteers to spread the load</p> <p>35. Consider providing <u>early training</u> and <u>ongoing coaching</u> in evaluation for the host communities</p> <p>36. <u>Simplify</u> and <u>reduce</u> the amount of project administration and paperwork generated, especially with respect to evaluation</p> <p>37. Provide more <u>opportunities for networking</u> between host communities, to share expertise and offer mutual support. Where possible, try to set up dedicated websites for the projects, with chatrooms and encourage exchange of information.</p>

E. Other	<p>38. Provide a better <u>briefing</u> for artists and evaluators in the ways in which rural communities function</p> <p>39. Where possible, enlist the guidance and support of the local authority <u>Arts Development Officers</u>, for the benefit of both the artists and the host communities, while ensuring that project management reporting lines are not compromised</p> <p>40. <u>Funders</u> should strive to ensure that other opportunities are offered to local parishes to engage in arts activities. ARC has created a demand for more, and the <u>project's exit strategy</u> should address this. Indeed, there should be a proper exit strategy developed for the conclusion of the whole programme</p> <p>41. Note the positive <u>value of tangible outputs</u> (photographs/ DVD etc), which appear to have extended the reach of the projects as well as contributing to their legacy. Ensuring that there are tangible outputs should be an integral part of any similar projects.</p>
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